

STATE OF NEW YORK  
COURT OF CLAIMS :: SYRACUSE DISTRICT

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DARLA R. WRIGHT

*Claimant,*

**VERIFIED CLAIM**

Claim No. \_\_\_\_\_

-vs.-

STATE OF NEW YORK,

*Defendant.*

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DARLA R. WRIGHT, the Claimant herein, alleges:

1. The claimant resides at 622 Trumbull Corners Road, Newfield, New York 14867.
2. This claim arose in the Town of Enfield, County of Tompkins on January 5, 2019.
3. This Court has jurisdiction pursuant to Court of Claims Act Section 9[2] on the ground that the claim relates to torts of a state employee committed on or after January 14, 2019.

**COUNT ONE**

4. On January 5, 2019, in the Town of Ithaca, the claimant's vehicle crashed into a ditch in the Town of Enfield after she swerved to avoid a deer.
5. Two state employees, New York State Police Troopers Jevon C. Pakkala and Mariella Pantano, came to the scene of accident.

6. The claimant truthfully denied that she was under the influence of alcohol or controlled substances.

7. While the search was pending, Pakkala and Pantano forced the claimant to stand outdoors in subfreezing weather for an extended period of time, causing extreme discomfort and exacerbating her existing physical impairments.

8. Pakkala and Pantano forced the claimant to engage in field sobriety tests that they either knew, or should have known, were of negligible probative value given the fact that the claimant had been forced to stand in the freezing weather for an extended period of time, and that she had disclosed physical conditions that would affect the accuracy of such tests.

9. Pakkala and Pantano falsely alleged that they smelled alcohol in the vehicle.

10. Pakkala and Pantano falsely reported that the claimant had admitted to drinking two glasses of wine.

11. Pakkala and Pantano published to third parties, including the Town of Enfield Court and the Tompkins County District Attorney, false and defamatory statements including the following: "had been drinking . . . 2 . . . wine," "driving while intoxicated," "appears to be impaired with drugs," "Wright had slurred speech and glass eyes," "I detected the odor of an alcoholic beverage emanating from the vehicle, and asked Wright how many drinks she had prior to driving the vehicle in the ditch," "Wright stated she had two glasses of wine but earlier, about 2 PM."

12. Pakkala and Pantano arrested the claimant and caused her confinement for several hours.

13. As a result of Pakkala's and Pantano's negligence and other tortious conduct, the claimant has sustained additional damage, including stress, discomfort, humiliation, loss of liberty, loss of sleep, anxiety, and damage to her personal and professional reputation.

14. The damage associated with loss of liberty is no less than \$100,000.00.

15. The damage associated with defamation is no less than \$100,000.00.

16. The other categories of damages from Pakkala's and Pantano's conduct are continuing.

### **COUNT TWO – NEGLIGENT HIRING**

17. The claimant repeats and restates the allegations of the preceding paragraphs.

18. Pakkala had been employed as an officer with the Ithaca Police Department before the New York State Police hired him.

19. Prior to his hiring by New York State Police, the hiring personnel either knew or with the exercise of reasonable diligence should have known that Pakkala had been inclined to make incorrect statements regarding critical skills essential to law enforcement officers, including the ability to correctly observe and report the bases for traffic stops, statements attributed to suspects, and the condition of suspects.

20. For example, on March 4, 2016 at approximately 12:35 a.m., in the City of Ithaca, Pakkala stopped a vehicle under the pretext that the driver had failed to use his turn signal before leaving the curbside parking space entering his lane of travel.

21. Pakkala made a series of incorrect statements, including misstatements regarding the suspect's condition; his performance of field sobriety tests; and a comment or comments attributed to the suspect.

22. As a result of Pakkala's misstatements, the driver was charged and prosecuted in the City of Ithaca Court for driving while intoxicated.

23. The court dismissed the charges after the prosecution learned of Pakkala's misstatements.

24. Upon information and belief, Pakkala's supervisors at the Ithaca Police Department learned of his misstatements.

25. The defendant State of New York's negligent hiring of Pakkala caused the aforementioned damages to the claimant; and accordingly, the claimant is entitled to money judgment in an amount to be determined at trial.

### **COUNT THREE -- NEGLIGENT TRAINING, SUPERVISION AND RETENTION**

26. The claimant repeats and restates the allegations contained in the preceding paragraphs.

27. Pakkala's and Pantano's supervisors have been negligent in their training of the two troopers.

28. The negligence includes failure to train Pakkala and Pantano to adequately document bases for stops, searches, field sobriety tests; and failure to document statements or conduct attributed to defendants.

29. Reasonable documentation would include videographic and audiographic recording of such stops and interactions.

30. Upon information and belief, from the time of his hiring to the present, Pakkala has engaged in a pattern of behavior that should, with the exercise of reasonable training and supervision, have alerted the defendant to take corrective action.

31. The defendant has failed to take adequate to monitor, correct, or ameliorate such behavior.

32. Upon information and belief, the pattern of behavior includes an aberrant amount of stops or arrests attributed to Pakkala; misstatements regarding the bases for traffic stops and other observations; and unorthodox behavior by Pakkala targeted toward DWI defendants.

33. For example, upon information and belief, in late 2017 or early 2018 Pakkala's supervisor(s) learned that Pakkala had repeatedly entered a particular defendant's name through a search mechanism for a law enforcement database, without a reasonable basis.

34. Upon information and belief, Pakkala's supervisor(s) warned him to stop the unauthorized searches.

35. Upon information and belief, Pakkala continued to run the individual's name through the database after the warning and after the defendant's criminal court case had concluded.

36. Upon information and belief, in or about February 2018 Pakkala's supervisors placed him on administrative leave following the revelations of his continued inappropriate conduct with respect to the database.

37. Pakkala's and Pantano's supervisors have been negligent by failing to train or supervise Pakkala with a reasonable degree of skill.

38. Pakkala's supervisors have been negligent by continuing retain Pakkala on road patrol following the revelations of the aforementioned behavior.

39. The conduct is continuing.

40. Damages include mental anguish, pain and suffering, and loss of liberty.

41. The damages are continuing.

42. As a result of the defendant's negligence, the claimant is entitled to an award of damages in an amount to be determined at trial.

#### **COUNT FOUR – FALSE IMPRISONMENT**

43. The claimant repeats and restates the allegations contained in the preceding paragraphs.

44. On January 14 and 15, 2019, the defendant, through Pakkala, willfully detained the claimant.

45. The detention was unlawful.

46. The detention was without the claimant's consent.

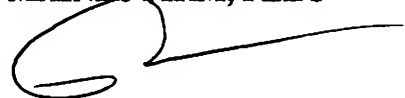
47. As a result of the defendant's conduct, the claimant has been damaged in an amount to be determined at trial.

#### **REQUEST FOR RELIEF**

WHEREFORE, the claimant respectfully requests a trial on the allegations stated herein; that the Court issue a judgment awarding damages to claimant and against the defendant in an amount to be determined at trial; and that the Court grant whatever other and further relief the Court deems just, equitable and proper.

Dated: April 2, 2019

**MAINES FIRM, PLLC**



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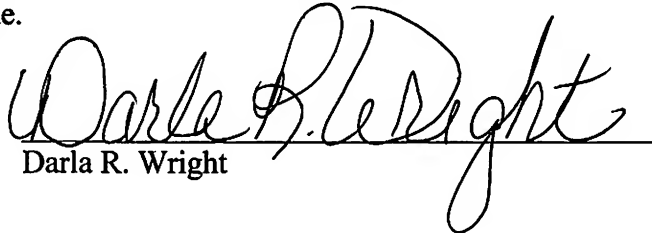
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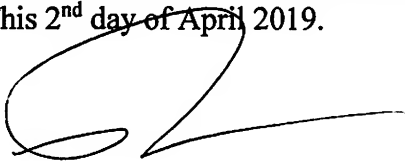
VERIFICATION

STATE OF NEW YORK     ) ss:  
COUNTY OF TOMPKINS    )

DARLA R. WRIGHT, being duly sworn, deposes and says that the allegations contained in the verified claim are true, except as to those allegations stated upon information and belief; and as to those, she believes them to be true.

  
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Darla R. Wright

Sworn to and subscribed before me  
This 2<sup>nd</sup> day of April 2019.



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Notary Public